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ABSTRACT

Innovative programs for the improvement of education in Georgia funded by the Quality Basic Education Act of 1985 are described. Developmental projects address priorities selected by the state board; must meet state validation criteria and have the potential for adoption throughout the state; and must be cost effective, with local fair share match funds required. Training center/dissemination projects are state projects that have been validated and are being disseminated to local school systems. Adoption funds give grants to local systems adopting a validated training center project. A state level evaluation system applies to each of these types of projects. Operations of specific programs are described. The projects discussed could be adopted by most elementary and middle schools in Georgia. (SLD)

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Evaluation of Innovation Projects: A State Level Strategy for Educational Improvement

by

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Evaluation of Innovation Projects:
A State Level Strategy for Educational Improvement

In the Spring of 1983 the Governor appointed a "blue ribbon" task force, the Educational Review Commission, to study the current status of education in the state of Georgia and to make recommendations for broad far-reaching changes that would improve the quality of education in the state. The findings of this task force and their recommendations were formulated into comprehensive legislation and passed by the General Assembly in March of 1985. This legislation, the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act, is the statute that governs the educational delivery system in this state.

One part of this Act, Section 20-2-250, provides for three types of innovative activities: developmental projects, training center/dissemination projects, and adoption projects. This part of the Act is managed and administered by state staff of the Georgia Department of Education under the Innovation Program. The quality control of the projects funded under the Innovation Program is assured through the use and expertise of a small cadre of highly trained and qualified "state validators". These individuals are specially selected local system personnel and university staff that meet an established set of criteria. They have been trained in a two-day workshop on the state validation process. These individuals review the developmental projects on-site and make recommendations to the state superintendent of schools. The State Superintendent of Schools is the only one who can actually certify the developmental project as state validated. Many times university staff from the cadre are selected to serve as the project evaluator to help guide the evaluation process of the project so it will be

capable of meeting the state validation criteria. This process assures the quality of the project under development and it helps assure that, if the data is statistically and educationally significant at the end of the developmental period, the project can demonstrate effectiveness and also be exportable throughout the state. Indeed this management process is a combined effort of state staff, local system staff, and university staff to bring about quality improvement efforts.

There are three types of projects funded under the Innovation Program. Each is designed to perform a specific function and service across the state and this is stated within the language of the Act. The developmental projects must address priorities passed by the state board, must have the potential for widespread adoption throughout the state, must be able to meet the state validation criteria, and must be cost effective in terms of exportability. A local fair share match to this project effort is required. The training center/dissemination projects are developmental efforts that have been state validated and are now capable of disseminating their program throughout the state. No local fair share match is required. The training center has the funding support necessary to provide awareness information, training, follow-up, and evaluation services to any school system in the state at no cost to the school system. The adoption project is supported by a small grant to local school systems to help them defray the initial cost of adopting a validated project from one of the training centers. This small grant helps support the local costs of paying substitutes to release teachers for staff development, travel to observe the validated project, and the initial start up materials necessary to implement the project. A local fair share match to this project effort is required.

The local fair share match establishes a commitment at the local level to the project effort.

The state level management system for the Innovation Program addresses priorities established by the State Board of Education. Developmental proposals are requested that address these priorities. These proposals are read and rated by a reader panel composed of certified state validators. Each proposal is read by at least three readers. The proposals are then ranked and the top proposals are read and rated by an evaluation expert from the state validator cadre. These ratings along with reviews by department staff determine which proposals are submitted to the State Board for funding. Developmental projects are funded for one year and may receive additional funding on an annual basis up to three years based on successful completion of each year's efforts. Each project annually is evaluated and reviewed on-site by a four member team of certified state validators.

During the initial negotiations with projects to be considered for funding, revisions to the proposal or project plan are discussed. This specifically includes the evaluation component. The use of an evaluation consultant as support to the project to carry out the evaluation component is a requirement. To this end a specific line item of the budget is set up to support the evaluation costs. This line item is "restricted" from use for any other purpose. This procedure assures that each project will go through an evaluation process that is designed against state validation criteria.

A state level evaluation system has been developed to identify the minimum requirements to be included in the evaluation design of each project. These requirements include the following:

A. Each project must collect base-line data.
B. All data collection must be objective-referenced.
C. Data collection and analysis will address the unique features of each project.
D. Data collection will be organized so that it can be synthesized across all projects.
E. Synthesis of the data will allow examination of the effectiveness of individual projects as well as examination of the overall effectiveness of the state effort.
F. The magnitude of the effect will be identified as the amount of influence the projects have had across the numbers of teachers and students involved.

In looking at the magnitude of the data to be collected and sent to the evaluator from the first four developmental projects funded in July of 1985, a different approach for the transmission of data was explored. Through the use of microcomputers and a modem hook-up to the University of Georgia, three projects have piloted an effort to perform the basic evaluation tasks and data collection at the project site and transmit the data directly by modem to the main frame computer at the university where it is then accessed by the evaluation specialist for analysis and interpretation. It was anticipated that this method would have tremendous potential and implications in terms of the expansion of the Innovation Program with a

higher funding level. During the first year of operation, it placed a large additional workload on both professional and clerical staff at the project site. There were problems with data organization and entry. There were also some problems in finding and reading the data at the university end. Most of these "bugs" were solved and the system streamlined, but the massive task of organizing and compiling the data for entry still remains as well as the huge task of data entry itself. This approach has been seen as a burden by the project site staff. This model still has potential for using technology in evaluating projects at multiple sites by one evaluator but additional resources will be needed at the project site to perform some of these tasks.

Although the evaluation design for each developmental project is specific and unique to the project, the primary source of data is the Statewide Assessment Program, where applicable. In developing the evaluation design, care is taken to try and use assessment instruments that are a part of this program. There are several reasons for this. Students do not need to be tested any more than necessary. Testing takes up instructional time. Testing is also expensive. In addition to the instruments in the Statewide Assessment Programs, other test instruments are used as the evaluation design dictates. The use of those instruments from the Statewide Assessment Program with developmental projects also has implicatons after validation. In the training center process, effectiveness data is collected from adoption sites. The use of already available data from the Statewide Assessment Program helps simplify the process.

In the summer of 1985, four developmental projects were funded. These

projects are now in their third year of operation and must demonstrate effectiveness by the end of this Spring or their funding will be terminated. At the end of the first year, all four projects showed some progress. In the elementary demonstration school of excellence, effectiveness was obtained on half of the measures. At the end of the second year, the data across all four projects was spotty with gaps in the two comprehensive projects. The on-site review teams in both years found the projects to be on target and in some cases exceeding expectations, but the hard data was not significant. It was finally determined that the control schools were actually implementing some of the same improvement activities as the experimental schools. In addition, the impact of the new legislation, the Quality Basic Education Act, was causing improved activities at all levels in schools across the state. Based on the data results of the second year with these projects, the major focus during the third year of funding was placed on evaluation activities.

In the summer of 1986, two more developmental projects were funded. At the end of the first year, on-site reviews of the projects were conducted and continued funding was recommended by the review team. In the one project, helping the parents of high risk third grade students use learning modules at home with their children, the data showed no difference between the treatment students and the control students. It was determined during the on-site review that the classroom teachers of these students were not even giving them the basic instructional assistance they were due. The students were seen by the classroom teachers as getting this help from the project staff. The classroom teachers were then using this extra amount of instructional time with other needy students in their class, the group from

which the control students were drawn. Adjustments were made within the project to assure that all students received the same instructional assistance from the classroom teacher.

During the summer of 1986, two existing training centers were refunded so that they could continue to provide services to local school systems across the state. Funds were available this year also to provide adoption grants to school systems to help support the initial cost of implementing an adoption from a training center. Evaluation data in terms of student achievement is collected from each adoption site by the training center, analyzed by the evaluation consultant of the training center, and the results interpreted to the school staff at the adoption site. In the case of the training center at Dalton City, a writing project, the data over three years showed a marked increase in student writing skills that directly related to the length of time the adoption had been implemented and maintained. In the case of the training center at Oconee County, a math project, the data showed a greater significant increase with low level high risk students, while average and gifted students still showed a significant increase in achievement.

In the spring of 1987 a third training center, an early intervention program, was funded in Houston County. The program is designed to serve high risk kindergarten and first grade students. In the initial adoptions at three sites, it became evident that the program worked very well with high risk first grade students and with those students who had to repeat kindergarten, but it did not work well with the 5 year old student who was beginning kindergarten. Thus a program to meet the needs of this 5 year old

student is now being developed. It will be implemented next September in Houston County in two schools and in one school in each satellite site in the other three school systems that have already adopted the program. An evaluation design will be developed for the project that meets state validation criteria. At the end of next year if the data can demonstrate the effectiveness of this effort, it will be submitted through the process of state validation and then disseminated across the state through the training center as a part of the Houston County Early Intervention Program.

The impact of the training center delivery system across the state is evident by the number of adoptions of these programs in the last two years. The following data reflect these two years:

	1986-87	1987-88 to date
Dalton ILA - K-12 Writing Project	137	30
Oconee STAMM - K-12 Math Project	68	18
Houston ECPC - K-1 Early Intervention Project		16

The state level management of the Innovation Program with the stringent evaluation component assures measurable outcomes, quality control and cost effectiveness. State legislation provides for the dissemination effort through the established system of a state network of training centers. The use of the state validation process assures the effectiveness of projects entering into the training network. The funding of adoption grants to local school systems provides initial support at the local level and augments the dissemination process of the training center. It also targets the state resources for improvement to the identified state priorities. The

evaluation process has been designed as an integral component across the developmental, training and adoption projects to maintain the quality of the Innovation Program. This program has the potential for making a large impact on improving education in this state. It has the stability of state funding for a base and the support of the Governor and the State Legislature. Currently, the developmental projects have impacted on students in an entire elementary school, on students in math and science in two middle schools, on elementary math students in four schools, on high risk third grade students, and on middle school and high school students using a word processing center to improve writing skills.

When validated, these projects could be adopted by most elementary (1176) and middle (190) schools in this state. The potential student impact for these grade levels is 695,000. One developmental project is designed to provide an educational management system through the use of content assessment instruments to measure the established school curriculum. This project would impact students at all grade levels (1,003,700) across the entire state. As this type of impact occurs, it is reasonable to expect the State Legislature to appropriate additional funds to meet a larger number of state priorities. This is already evident by an increase from $588,000 to $670,500 in the Innovation Program funds recently appropriated by the General Assembly.